

**Title:** The Targeted Outreach for Pregnant Women Act Jail Programs, Tallahassee, FL

**Organization:** Bureau of HIV/AIDS, Florida Department of Health

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**Topical Issues of Focus:** Using CDC funding to build on existing HIV programs, community outreach

### **Background/Objectives**

The 2001 U.S. Department of Justice report "Correctional Health Care" states women offenders are one of the fastest growing segments of the correctional population, and approximately six percent of women are pregnant at the time of their incarceration. In October 2002, the HIV & Hepatitis Education Prison Project reported, "12–18% of those with HIV pass through our nation's jails and prisons every year." These national data draw attention to the importance of focusing on female jail populations for HIV prevention activities. In addition, Florida surveillance data have highlighted the need for effective intervention programs for pregnant women within the jail setting.

Florida's Targeted Outreach for Pregnant Women Act program (TOPWA) was established in 1999 to address the high number of HIV-infected infants born in the state. Through contracts with community-based organizations, the TOPWA program works to ensure all high-risk pregnant women know their HIV status, and assists women in accessing early and continuous prenatal care. Eligible clients are pregnant women not receiving adequate prenatal care and/or at risk for giving birth to an HIV-infected or substance-exposed infant. There are currently twelve TOPWA program providers serving eleven Florida counties. Several TOPWA programs had already established a link with their local county jail to provide TOPWA services at a variety of levels depending upon the jail administration. However, prior to the 2001 perinatal prevention supplemental funding, there had not been funds available to establish permanent TOPWA jail programs. We chose Palm Beach County to pilot our first official TOPWA jail program.

### **Methods**

The Palm Beach County TOPWA jail program was established in February, 2002 as an expansion of the existing Palm Beach TOPWA program provided by Children's Case Management Organization, Inc. Initially, the provider and local health department were stymied in their efforts to establish the program by simply not knowing with whom to work in order to gain access to the jail. Eventually the state HIV/AIDS program office made contact with the Palm Beach STD Office. Their staff had been active in the jail for a number of years, and was able to advocate on behalf of the program to the jail administrators. Subsequently, access to the jail took four months of negotiation followed

by the development of a strong working relationship between jail staff and the local TOPWA program provider.

Outreach workers are now permitted to screen female inmates for TOPWA eligibility, conduct client needs assessments, and offer on-site HIV testing and pregnancy testing. All women are provided education and literature on HIV/AIDS, STDs, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Workers advocate on behalf of pregnant women to ensure they receive appropriate prenatal care and other needed services while they are incarcerated, and also upon release. Enrolled clients are tracked through the birth of the infant via follow-up phone calls and home visits by program outreach staff. Having an established link to a community outreach program facilitates client follow-up after release and enables jail staff to tap into existing resources and agency linkages for client referrals.

## **Results**

During the first year of service provision, the Palm Beach County TOPWA jail program screened 760 incarcerated women and enrolled 53 pregnant women into the program, 32 (60%) of whom had not received prior prenatal care. Enrolled women were provided 68 referrals for prenatal care and other needed services. Sixty-two percent of enrolled clients were racial/ethnic minorities. TOPWA staff completed 230 on-site pregnancy tests, identifying thirteen pregnant women who were unaware of their pregnancy. They also conducted 659 HIV tests identifying 37 (5.6%) HIV-infected women, six of whom were also pregnant. Forty percent of enrolled pregnant women were using substances at the time of their arrest, with one quarter of those women using crack cocaine. To date, none of the infants born to clients enrolled in the Palm Beach jail program have been documented as HIV infected or substance exposed.

## **Conclusions**

Numerous studies indicate that high-risk activity such as substance abuse and prostitution may lead to HIV infection among women who are later incarcerated. While incarceration offers HIV programs an opportunity to provide intervention to at-risk individuals, it also poses a challenge to the continuity of care for pregnant women and HIV-infected women. Consequently, HIV prevention programs focusing on these groups should include a comprehensive array of services, including client advocacy and linkages into care during incarceration and upon release.

Due to the success of the Palm Beach pilot program, two more TOPWA jail programs have been established at the Orange County jail and the Hillsborough County jail. Our experience has taught us that in working with the jails we are building an ongoing relationship of trust. The Orange County TOPWA staff was permitted initially only to conduct basic TOPWA screenings and referrals. However, after working in the jail for several weeks and establishing a rapport with jail staff, they are now allowed to conduct on-site HIV testing and on-site pregnancy testing. Our future plans are to incorporate rapid HIV testing into the jail programs to facilitate effective HIV testing for females who are bonded out after their arrest.